

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A computerized reservation system for making customer time-specific reservations of fungible items, the system comprising:

one or more individual service providers having a computing system executing computer software through which reservations of fungible items for the respective individual service providers may be made directly;

a central reservation provider having a computing system executing computer software through which reservations of fungible items for any of the one or more individual service providers may be made; and

a link for communicating between the central reservation provider computer system and the respective individual service providers computer system, wherein a first portion of the available reservations from each individual service provider are held by the central reservation provider and a second portion of the available reservations from each individual service provider are held by that respective individual service provider and, when a reservation of fungible items requested from either the central reservation provider or an individual service provider is not available from that provider or when the portion of available reservations held by either the computing system of the central reservation provider or the computing system of the individual service provider drops below a predefined minimum level at any time, the link between the central reservation provider computing system and the individual service provider computing system is activated by one of the computing systems of central reservation provider and individual service providers and available reservations of fungible items are transferred from the other of the central reservation provider or the individual service provider to the central reservation provider or the individual service provider via the communication link so as to allow a reservation of fungible items to be made and when a reservation request is from one of the central reservation provider or one of the individual service providers is available from that provider, the reservation of fungible items is made by that provider without communicating with the other of the central reservation provider or one of the individual service providers.

2. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the central reservation provider is an Internet booking service.

3. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the individual service provider uses computer software for communicating automatically with the Internet booking service.
4. (Currently amended) A reservation system as claimed in claim 3, wherein the individual service provider's reservation system is installed over a local area network.
5. (Previously Presented) A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the system comprises means for automatically activating the link for communicating between the central reservation provider and individual service providers at regular intervals to transfer available reservations between the providers if the distribution of the available reservations between the providers is out of balance.
6. (Previously Presented) A reservation system as claimed in claim 1, the individual service providers computing system and the central reservation provider computing system being configured to allow a reservation to be made for one of a plurality of items from available reservations, the time period of availability of each item is being divided into time consecutive blocks of a predetermined duration so as to provide a plurality of sets of said time consecutive blocks representing the total availability of the plurality of items within the time period, wherein a reservation request is accepted if at least one time consecutive block is available for each part of the time period for which the reservation is requested such that blocks relating to more than one of the items may be combined to provide the reservation.
7. (Currently Amended) A computerized reservation system for reserving one or more time-specific blocks of a plurality of fungible items, the computer reservation system comprising executing computer readable instructions that when executing on a computing system cause a processor of the computerized reservation system to divide the time period of availability of each fungible item into time consecutive blocks of a predetermined duration so as to provide a plurality of sets of said consecutive blocks representing the total availability of the plurality of fungible items within the time period of availability, wherein the computerized reservation system accepts

a time-specific reservation request if at least one time consecutive block is available for each part of the time period for which the reservation is requested such that time consecutive blocks relating to more than one of the fungible items may be combined to provide the reservation.

8. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, further comprising:

a database for storing data defining the numbers and types of items available for reservation together with details of any reservations made; and

means for calculating the number of available blocks using the data from the database each time that a reservation is requested.

9. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system is for reserving a plurality of different types of items and the blocks are tagged to indicate the type of item to which they refer.

10. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 9, wherein a reservation is only made if at least one consecutive block relating to the type of item required is available for each consecutive part of the time period for which the reservation is required.

11. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system is for making restaurant reservations and the blocks are of 15 minute duration.

12. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes means for handling a fixed location reservation such that when a fixed location reservation is requested, a set of consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations are designated as fixed location blocks, the blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested are designated as being occupied and the remaining designated fixed location blocks may not be combined with blocks other than the said fixed location blocks to form a reservation.

13. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 12, wherein if consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations are not present, the system preferably

alerts a user to the fact that it is possible that not all of the reservations made by the system will be honoured if the fixed location reservation is accepted.

14. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes:
 - means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;
 - means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations; and
 - means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein if no other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the reservation time period are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming after the reservation time period are retained as fungible or combinable blocks.

15. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the system further comprises means for identifying the latest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block, such that when the system determines that other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the latest block to be designated as a fixed location block are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming after the last block to be designated as a fixed location block are retained in the system as fungible or combinable blocks.

16. (Previously Presented) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising:
 - means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;

means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations; and

means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein if no other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which precede the reservation time period and any buffer period which the service provider chooses to add before the reservation period are retained as fungible or combinable blocks, and the selected blocks coming after the reservation time period are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation.

17. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 16, wherein the system further comprises means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block, such that when the system determines that other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made, the selected blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and the selected blocks coming before the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block are retained in the system as fungible or combinable blocks.

18. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the system includes:

means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising:

means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations;

means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block;

means for identifying the latest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block; and

means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied, wherein the system designates the blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated and the blocks which precede the latest block to be designated as

fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation, and wherein any remaining blocks from the selected blocks are retained as fungible or combinable blocks.

19. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, further comprising:
 - means for handling a fixed location reservation comprising means for checking whether any other fixed location reservations for items of the type requested have been made when a fixed location reservation is requested;
 - means for selecting consecutive unoccupied blocks corresponding to the type of item for which the reservation is requested and covering the entire time period available for reservations;
 - means for designating the selected blocks corresponding to the reservation time period requested as being occupied;
 - means for identifying the latest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block across all reservations made if not treated under way (iv);
 - means for identifying the earliest block in time to have been designated as a fixed location block across all reservations made if not treated under way (iv); and
 - means for treating each of the separate fixed location reservations in any one of the following ways in order to maximise the number of fungible or combinable blocks available within the database at any time:
 - i) designating the selected blocks which precede the latest block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and designating the selected blocks coming after the last block as fungible or combinable blocks; or
 - ii) designating the selected blocks which come after the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation and designating the selected blocks coming before the earliest block to be designated as a fixed location block as fungible or combinable blocks which are retained; or
 - iii) designating the blocks which come between the earliest block and the latest block as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation, and designating any remaining blocks from the selected blocks as fungible or combinable blocks which are retained; or
 - iv) designating all the selected blocks as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation,

wherein the way in which each separate fixed location reservation is treated may be altered each time that a new reservation is made, and the latest block and earliest block are re-identified each time that a new reservation is made or that the way in which any fixed location reservation is treated is altered.

20. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 19, the system further comprising means for handling at least two fixed location reservations for the same item, in which the at least two reservations are treated as a single reservation in one of ways (i), (ii) and (iii), and any blocks located between the at least two reservations in time are designated as fixed location blocks which may not be combined with other blocks to form a reservation.

21. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 19, the system further comprising means to split the dining session into two separate sessions such that, if at any time every block representing a reservation has been reserved, the session may be split into a first session up to and/or including that time and a second session including and/or from after that time in order to further maximise the number of fungible or combinable blocks available within the system at any time.

22. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein blocks or sets of blocks of predetermined duration representing items available for reservation from an individual service provider are distributed between a central reservation provider and the individual service provider such that reservations may be made through either of the individual service provider or the central reservation provider.

23. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 22, the system further comprising means for communicating between the central reservation provider and the individual service provider, wherein if a reservation requested from either the central reservation provider or the individual service provider is not available from that provider, available blocks or sets of blocks are transferred from the other of the central reservation provider or the individual service provider to the central reservation provider or the individual service provider via the means for communicating so as to allow a reservation to be made.

24. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 22, the system further comprising means for communicating between the central reservation provider and the individual service provider, wherein if the number of blocks or sets of blocks held by either the central reservation provider or the individual service provider falls below a predetermined minimum level at any time, available blocks are transferred from the other of the central reservation provider or the individual service provider to the central reservation provider or the individual service provider via the means for communicating.

25. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 22, wherein the system is configured such that fixed location reservations may only be made through the individual service provider.

26. (Original) A reservation system as claimed in claim 25, wherein if the blocks required to make a fixed location reservation are not available from the central reservation provider or the individual service provider, the system alerts a user to the fact that it is possible that not all the reservations will be honoured if the fixed location reservation is accepted.

27. (New) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the computing system is a computerized reservation system of a central reservation provider.

28. (New) A reservation system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the computing system is a computerized reservation system of an individual service provider.

29. (New) A computer-readable medium holding instructions for reserving one or more time-specific blocks of a plurality of fungible items, the instructions comprising the steps of:

dividing the time period of availability of each fungible item into time consecutive blocks of a predetermined duration so as to provide a plurality of sets of said consecutive blocks representing the total availability of the plurality of fungible items within the time period of availability; and

accepting a time-specific_reservation request if at least one time consecutive block is available for each part of the time period for which the reservation is requested such that time consecutive blocks relating to more than one of the fungible items may be combined to provide the reservation.